

STAGES:

Support for Learners with Special Needs

Who are these learners?

How does Stages support them?

Learners with special needs have one or more of the following types of challenges—

- **AUTISM:**

Stages provides an autistic student with access to the exploration of early language skills. In the process of completing benchmark activities valuable information regarding the learner's receptive language performance and reactions to levels of representation and prompting styles are documented.

- **DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY:**

Stages allows a developmentally delayed learner to utilize the collection of Divergent activities to observe and explore language and cognitive concepts in a supportive, risk free environment. They enjoy the additional benefit of becoming comfortable with the content before being expected to demonstrate an understanding of it using the Convergent assessment activities.

- **INTELLECTUAL:**

Stages allows a learner with significant cognitive delays to practice and develop purposeful interaction with his environment, developing the skill of cause and effect. Barrier free assessment activities provide an arena for trying out a range of alternative input devices in combination with varied types of prompts, and activity content, length, and complexity, while working toward device mastery. Having mastered an input device, the same cognitively impaired student can benefit from later Stages activities to explore and demonstrate an understanding of traditional community-based functional living skills.

- **SENSORY:**

Stages affords a sensory impaired learner an enhanced opportunity to express a true understanding of concepts learned in an environment where they are not penalized for their disability. A low vision student's performance on an academic assessment of academic concepts is not compromised by an inability to efficiently focus, track and discriminate visual symbols. Clean and visually enhanced assessment activity screens facilitate accuracy in selecting desired targets. Similarly, adapted keyboards with customized layouts become effective input devices supporting the visual need for high contrast or larger keys in later writing activities.

- **NEUROLOGICAL/PHYSICAL:**

Stages benchmark activity kits open up an opportunity for individuals at all levels of functioning who experience difficulty executing or controlling fine and gross motor movements to participate in authentic performance based assessment of language and cognitive concepts. A learner unable to consistently perform an accurate discrete point toward a desired target can utilize a switch and scanning to respond indicating a choice.

- **EMOTIONAL:**

Stages provides a supportive and risk-free environment for learners with emotional needs. After incorrect responses the learner is prompted before trying again. Subsequent incorrect responses yield fewer choices on the next attempt. Research has proven that this strategy, successive approximations, promotes learning. Typical assessment environments do not incorporate this type of learner feedback and take advantage of the opportunity to shape the learner's cognitive understanding.

- **COMMUNICATION:**

Stages facilitates optimal performance on assessment activities for individuals with oral language communication disorders by making it possible for them to utilize any one of a wide range of alternative input devices and access modes to complete benchmark activities, including switches, scanning or adapted keyboards. The availability of multisensory prompts and feedback further strengthen these individuals' opportunities for success.

Students with written communication delays or deficits are challenged by conventional writing tools such as pencil, paper and print dictionaries. These learners are supported during Stages assessment activities by the use of personal word lists, word editors to help personalize writing, picture choices to develop story themes, and grammatically correct cues to help with expressing thoughts more readily.